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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CHANGED MONTH OF MEETING PARA 1 AND 2)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/07/2018
TAGS: [KISL](#) [PTER](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: ISLAMIST PARTY LEADER COMMENTS ON
TERRORIST PLOT, MOROCCAN LEADERSHIP, AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Classified By: POLCOUNS Craig M. Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The (Islamist) Justice and Development Party (PJD) number two, Lahcen Daoudi, roundly criticized the recent arrests of several prominent Islamist politicians in connection to the Belleraj terrorism case. During a March 5 meeting with Polcouns, he argued that the security services had "drawn the circle too widely," the politicians in question had long moved away from extremism, and implied the arrests carry a message aimed at the PJD. Daoudi said King Mohammed VI pushed domestic policy changes and expansion of Morocco's tourist industry too far, too fast for the still conservative majority. He alleged neglect of acute problems like rising food prices and corruption, which he called institutionalized. Daoudi considered Parliament's role in policy making to be negligible. End summary.

Arrests of Politicians

¶2. (C) During a March 5 call on Lahcen Daoudi, number two in Morocco's (Islamist) Justice and Development Party (PJD), Polcouns sought the PJD's reaction to the recent arrests of several leading Islamist politicians (i.e., Secretary General of the Civilized Alternative Party Mohammed Moatassim, Secretary General for the political association The Nation

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Mohammed Marwani, and PJD member Mae El Ainain Abadila) in connection to the Belleraj terrorist case. Daoudi said the authorities had badly handled the arrests and the investigation. While conceding there were terrorists who had to be brought to justice, Daoudi said there was a big gap between these wrong doers and the politicians, adding that the security services had "drawn the circle too widely."

¶3. (C) Some commentators in the Moroccan press have speculated, through the arrests of the politicians, the GOM was firing a shot across the bow of the PJD--possibly to dampen support for the PJD in the run up to 2009 municipal elections. Daoudi said the Chabiba Islamia ("Islamist Youth"), a small Islamic political movement that disintegrated in the 1970's for radical behavior and to which all of the arrested politicians had a connection, was ancient history. Daoudi criticized the security services for dragging old skeletons out of the closet. The politicians, shortly thereafter, adopted very moderate positions (more moderate, he implied, than the PJD). There is no indication at all that they secretly remained radicals. If they had been radicals, Daoudi underlined, some of the young people in their movement would reflect this radicalism. Instead, the

youth they have been associated with are also moderate. In response to questions about connections to the Chabiba, Daoudi acknowledged that this may have been a message to his party.

Mistakes Made in PJD Moralization Campaign

¶4. (C) Daoudi characterized the recent inauguration of a PJD youth moralization campaign in the northern Moroccan town Ksar El-Kebir (likely chosen due to the arrests and trial of a group of individuals for participating in an alleged gay wedding in late November 2007) as a "mistake." Daoudi defensively called the media reactions to the PJD moralization campaign out of proportion, adding that the campaign had not been launched to exploit Ksar El-Kebir controversy--it was, in any case, turning away from issues of personal liberty to issues of justice. Daoudi is due to give an anti-corruption speech as part of this campaign in the coming days.

¶5. (C) Daoudi said that the PJD simply supports and defends the institution of marriage (between a man and a woman). "Now a few francophone magazines, which few average Moroccans ever read, are making a big deal of this."

Criticism of the King and the Role of Parliament

¶6. (C) Daoudi ventured that the King's time horizon for changes is shorter than many observers believe, adding that he personally thought that King Mohammed was moving too far, too fast with changes in Morocco. While he viewed the King's emphasis on development was both well placed and publicized, Daoudi said that the King, attesting to his youth and inexperience, was unable to grasp the deeper societal issues that might be adversely affected by rapid change.

¶7. (C) He cited the rapid development of Morocco's tourist industry as overzealous given the inherent fragility of the Moroccan economy and the possible negative shocks that events, like terrorist attacks, might cause to this sector. By contrast, he said that Hassan II (i.e., Mohammed VI's father) had placed paramount importance on national stability and made changes slowly and incrementally. When asked about Parliament's role in policy making, Daoudi likened Parliamentarians to caged birds, which the crown allows to fly around so long as they remain in their cage.

Economics and Corruption

¶8. (C) An academic economist before entering politics, Daoudi complained the distribution of wealth was becoming ever more skewed in Morocco. Although he acknowledged that rising prices for basic items (like food) were a global problem, he complained that Morocco's poor were really feeling the pinch with little relief on the horizon from GOM policies.

¶9. (C) Daoudi called the rampant low level corruption, particularly among the law enforcement community, institutionalized and a serious social illness in Morocco. He said that, in the current framework, the "machine does not work," and an increase in the salaries of law enforcement officers was badly needed as a first step to ameliorate the problem. In addition, Daoudi said that corruption at the base of society was rising up through the social strata of Morocco, creating a culture of clientalism, which is difficult to overcome; adding that if someone tries to do their job honestly, they run the risk of being replaced. He half jokingly demurred when asked if this was a problem in Parliament.

¶10. (C) Comment: Daoudi, along with Party Secretary-General Saadeddine El-Othmani, is a symbol of the "moderate face" of

this Islamist party. A modernist not unsympathetic to the West, Daoudi announced earlier this year that he would vacate his party leadership post after the PJD's annual conference in July. This prompted speculation that harder-line party members would gain greater influence. Daoudi told us he was thinking of establishing a business school after he leaves.

End comment.

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